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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

10 December 1954

STAFF MEMORANDUM NO. 93-54

SUBJECT: "Peaceful Coexistence": Marxism in the Atomic Age

1. The discussions of Marxist-Leninist theory which, in the Soviet Union, provide a means of keeping dogma abreast of changing reality afford the outside world an occasional opportunity to watch Soviet policy in the process of formulation, and to gauge, in some degree, the Soviet leaders' own evaluation of the course of world events. The discussion of "peaceful coexistence" which, over the past year, has been developing in the Soviet theoretical journals, is a case in point. Although this discussion has resulted in no very clear restatement of Soviet doctrine, enough has been written to reveal the impact of changing circumstances upon Soviet thought and to demonstrate the Soviet leaders' concern to find a Marxist rationalization for the policies which these changes are apparently leading them to adopt.

2. The problem of "peaceful coexistence" has probably become an issue in Soviet theory as a result of the experience of World War II and subsequent developments in nuclear weapons which have brought home to Soviet leaders the dreadful implications of Soviet involvement in a third world war. Statements which occasionally slip through the generally optimistic facade of propaganda suggest the apprehension with which Soviet leaders assess the implications of a war fought with nuclear weapons. The current effort at reconciling the possibility of "peaceful coexistence" with the contradictory implications of Marxist theory has proceeded in stages. During the first stage of the discussion, an attempt was made to deal with Lenin's thesis regarding the inevitability of wars in the present stage of monopoly capitalism and to discover a theoretical escape from the unpromising fate which, in this era of universal wars, the Leninist thesis had come to entail. During the second stage, the "difficult" implications of Lenin's thesis were allowed to recede

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into the background, and hope was attached instead to the more reassuring prospect of an unassisted capitalist disintegration. As in all such rational systems, of course, no dogma is ever explicitly repudiated, and the selection of texts and the emphases attached thereto are the factors which carry significance. But more significant than the texts themselves, as a revelation of the trend of official thought, is the fact that the discussion on "peaceful co-existence" has occurred at all.

3. The present discussion on "peaceful coexistence" began with an article by M. Gus in Zvezda, an organ of the Union of Soviet Writers, in November, 1953. Gus argued the possibility of coexistence essentially from a voluntaristic point of view. He admitted the principle of the inevitability of war under capitalism, but denied that mankind was thereby deprived of the opportunity of limiting or averting the operation of the law. "Marxism-Leninism," he argued, "having armed us with the knowledge of this law, thereby enables and teaches us to weaken, to restrict the destructive, pernicious operation of the law of the inevitability of imperialist wars. And practice has already shown and proved that we are able....to paralyze the operation of this law..." Whether Gus' article was deliberately inspired to provoke debate on a topic of current concern or to provide reassurance to intellectuals troubled over a "difficult" dogma, or whether Gus and his associates had misinterpreted the scope of the Party's injunction to greater self-criticism we shall perhaps never know. In any case, the publication of the article was an extraordinary event. Gus' argument not only essayed a major reformulation of Stalin's own restatement in 1952 of Lenin's thesis on the inevitability of imperialist wars, but undercut the doctrine of capitalist encirclement, and indeed brought into question the fundamental deterministic assumption of Marxist philosophy. For one or more of these reasons, the Soviet leaders apparently felt that Gus had done too far and his errors were criticized in the following months.

4. The initial reprimand appeared in the first issue of Kommunist, in January 1954, in an article written by V. Krushkov, Chief of the Agitprop section of the Central Committee. This was followed in February by a more detailed refutation in Zvezda. Tereshkin, the author of the latter article, went back to Stalin's analysis in the Economic Problems of Socialism, and distinguished between the possibility of preventing a particular war through the instrumentality of the peace movement, which he admitted, and the possibility of preventing or "paralyzing" the operation of the law of the inevitability of imperialist wars, which he denied. "It appears," wrote Tereshkin ironically, "that, if one cannot destroy a law, one can, it seems, paralyze it and thus make it inoperative. A paralyzed law is already not a law; it is in a state of paralysis and cannot act. It is both a law and not a law. Such a proposition has nothing in common with Marxist-Leninist theory."

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5. The discussion rested on this rather negative note until September, when Leontyev, writing in Kommunist, and apparently under the influence of the newly published textbook on political economy, drew up the current official position on the question. The result is less a solution of the philosophical problem than an evasion of it, and what is lacking in logic is replaced with bombast. However, where he does attempt rationalization, Leontyev seeks to place the whole problem on a new footing by emphasizing not the inevitability of imperialist wars but rather the inexorability of capitalist disintegration, presumably by force of internal contradictions. This shifting of the focus from one aspect of dogma to another is apparently designed to eclipse the "difficult" doctrine with one less unpalatable. "Marxism-Leninism teaches," wrote Leontyev, "that the replacement of one social system by another takes place as the result of objective economic laws... When in one country or another the objective factors for the replacement of the old social structure by the new are present, this change becomes completely inevitable. The progressive forces of humanity know that the fate of the capitalist system is inevitable---without war as the result of the aggravation of its internal contradictions."

6. This new tack, which managed to combine reassurance with bluster, was followed up by Varga in a more urbane elaboration in an October issue of New Times. Like Leontyev, Varga subordinated the philosophical question and, exhibiting a sophisticated reverence for the arts and fruits of Western civilization, managed to smooth over philosophical difficulties with persuasion and sweet reasonableness. In one place, however, he reiterated the philosophical line of Kommunist, and affirmed that "the inherent laws of capitalism are driving it to its doom." Like Leontyev, in connection with this problem, he is principally concerned with refuting the allegation that the Soviet peace policy is only an expedient intended to disguise mere Machiavellian intentions. Varga's introduction to this discussion may have a particular significance because of the similarity between Gus' repudiated doctrine and the doctrine which Varga himself was forced to recant in 1949, namely the "voluntarist" heresy that that the policies of capitalist states could postpone the collapse of their economies, and that the growing power of the US made war between the "imperialist" states extremely unlikely. The double recantation which may be implied could be intended to reaffirm the repudiation of the Gus thesis, and to refortify the current official position.

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7. The question of the real significance of the theoretical thrust and counterthrust described above remains to be analyzed. It seems clear, first of all, that a need must have been felt by the Soviet leaders to reassure troubled minds disturbed by the implications of a doctrine which appeared to threaten not only personal security but national interests as well. The new Soviet bureaucracy, technically trained and motivated to a large degree by the requirements of business efficiency, must harbor many an intellectual who yearns for nothing better than peace, stability, and reassurance about the future. Nevertheless, the present discussion cannot be explained alone as an attempt to assuage such concern. It is much more likely that the opening of debate on such a critical doctrine of Marxism indicates that a fairly fundamental rethinking of Soviet policy has been going on at the highest levels and that the Soviet leaders are attempting to bring Communist doctrine into closer alignment with their pragmatic calculations.

8. The evidence as to the character of these pragmatic calculations is less clear, but perhaps the best hint as to their nature is contained in Varga's reiteration of Malenkov's statement of last March that a new world war would mean the destruction of "world civilization." Since 1949 Soviet leaders have on numerous occasions foreseen a more discriminating war which would result in the destruction of "world capitalism" alone. These recent indications of a more uncertain prognosis probably reflect a growing appreciation among the Soviet leaders of the nature of the weapons which now make up the world's arsenal, and a more realistic appraisal of the world balance of power. Another element in the Soviet calculations, of course, is the continuing concern with the manifold problems of building socialism at home, and with the requirements for peace and stability which these tasks involve.

9. Much of what the Soviet writers have to say about "peaceful coexistence" can be written off as propaganda, but there are features of the discussion described above which reflect a serious preoccupation with the problem of coexistence on the part of Soviet leaders. Soviet theoretical formulations should not, of course, be taken as guide-lines to Soviet courses of action for more than a short period ahead, since the very process of reformulation, which takes place from time to time, is in itself an indication of the flexibility and opportunism of Soviet policy. Nevertheless, the recent discussion does suggest that the Soviet leaders have attempted to come to grips with a changing

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world reality, and to explain to the faithful, in Marxist formulae, what this means with respect to the Soviet role in the present stage of history. As far as we can interpret it, their explanation suggests that they are slightly more optimistic than heretofore about the possibility of peace, and considerably more concerned about the hazards of war.



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